

***Rep. Israel to introduce bill removing Social Security numbers from Medicare cards***

Commack, NY— On Friday, Rep. Steve Israel (D – Huntington) joined with State Senator John J. Flanagan, Assemblyman Andrew Raia and Commack seniors to announce the introduction of legislation to protect seniors from identity theft and fraud. Rep. Israel's bill will remove Social Security numbers from Medicare and Medicaid cards.

"According to the Federal Trade Commission (FTC), as many as one in five seniors will be hit by fraud. However, there is something very simple that we can do to bring that number down," said Rep. Israel. "In my calls and forums with seniors, I've heard concerns about the fact that Medicare cards include a person's Social Security number. Seniors regularly have to travel with and use their Medicare cards in public, putting their Social Security numbers up for grabs. That's why I'm introducing a bill to protect seniors from identity theft and fraud by removing Social Security numbers from Medicare cards."

"Identity theft continues to be a growing problem throughout our state and one that can severely disrupt lives and impact our economy. Today's legislation will provide everyone who receives these government issued identification cards with a level of comfort and will help them keep their personal information private. I applaud Congressman Israel for taking the lead with this commonsense proposal and working to protect our most vulnerable residents," stated Senator Flanagan.

"Everyday the threat of identity theft becomes more surreal and we must do all we can to ensure the protection of our most vulnerable populations and most-private information. I applaud Congressman Israel's measure to remove such information as one's Social Security number from Medicare cards. There are those who relish the opportunity to take advantage of the growing senior citizen population for criminal gain and we must try to prevent such actions," Assemblyman Raia said.

Rep. Israel's legislation, the Seniors Identity Theft Protection Act, will require that Social Security numbers be removed from Medicare and Medicaid cards and that the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Service develop an alternative identification number for Medicare and Medicaid cards. This legislation will protect 44 million Medicare beneficiaries from an increased risk of identity theft and financial fraud. According to the FTC, identity theft is the fastest growing type of fraud in the U.S. and costs consumers about \$50 billion a year.

Rep. Israel has also worked with local law enforcement to protect seniors. He previously secured \$282,000 in federal funding for Suffolk County DA Thomas Spota to establish a Senior Abuse Unit to prosecute crimes targeted at seniors. Last year he hosted a senior identity theft workshop to educate seniors and the community about the threats of scam artists.

The FTC has issued the following tips for seniors on how to avoid being the victim of identity theft or fraud:

- Protect your Social Security number. Don't carry your Social Security card in your wallet or

write your Social Security number on a check. Give it out only if absolutely necessary or ask to use another identifier.

- Shred financial documents and paperwork with personal information before you discard them.
- Don't give out personal information on the phone, through the mail, or over the Internet unless you know who you are dealing with.
- Never click on links sent in unsolicited emails; instead, type in a web address you know. Use firewalls, anti-spyware, and anti-virus software to protect your home computer; keep them up-to-date.
- Don't use an obvious password like your birth date, your mother's maiden name, or the last four digits of your Social Security number.
- Keep your personal information in a secure place at home, especially seniors where others have access to their homes (e.g. caregivers or other service providers)